

A Serial of Instruction Inviting Grave Research.
No. 11.

Your exegesis of Acts 15, upon which you base your authority for holding an annual legislature, is weak, incorrect and inconsistent.

The difficulty there alluded to was that "certain men who came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, 'Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses ye cannot be saved.'" Their teaching was not authorized by Christ. It was an addition to the Gospel, although they may have thought that it was "according to the spirit and meaning of the Gospel." The convention that handled that question was neither an annual nor a general convention. It is the only one of the kind mentioned in the Scriptures. The decision reached was that the brethren did not need to be circumcised in order to salvation as the men from Judea taught. Why not? Because Christ did not command it; because it was not in the Gospel; it was rejected because nothing but the Gospel, the whole Gospel, is essential to salvation, as the Brethren now teach.

To get at the rational force of the conclusion arrived at, Acts 15, we might paraphrase it thus: "And certain men which came down from Double Pipe Creek, Md., Huntingdon, Pa., North Manchester, Ind., Lena, Ill., and elsewhere, and said, 'except ye observe the customs and usages of the church after the mandates of Annual Meeting, ye cannot be saved.'" Apply the verdict of Acts 15: 14, 29, and you have the teachers from Double Pipe Creek, Md., to Lena, Ill., just where Peter Paul and Barnabas put the men who came down from Judea, and ditto with the customs and usages of Annual Meeting. The latter addition to the Gospel, and the former (the circumcision authorized by Moses) belong together, and are equally condemned and abrogated by the logic of Acts 15. It stands as a precedent for all time, that when "certain men" no matter from where they hail, teach additions to the Gospel, or preach any doctrine, custom or usage not in the Gospel as necessary to church membership or essential to salvation, they fall under the condemnation of Acts 15. It was there devolved as plainly and potently as the spirit of God could stamp facts on paper, that the Gospel and nothing but the Gospel is the law of the church, and each and every exterior duty, whether circumcision, or round-tailed coat, or plain white cap, whether taught by men from Judea or Indiana, is an addition to the Gospel and amenable to Rev. 22: 18.

Acts 15 cannot with consistency be strained into a precedent for any kind of a convention in modern times. All the business that could possibly be transacted under precedent of Acts 15, is transacted by Acts 15. It needs no convention. That convention was conducted by inspired men, for an inspired purpose and all possible contingencies that can ever arise under it, are as directly manageable by it as cases that arise under the laws of baptism, feet-washing, and the Lord's supper. No one would think of calling a convention under the latter's authority. Modern conventions are held exclusively upon their merits, and not upon Gospel authority. No one is bound to attend them any more than he is bound to engage in "buying and shipping stock." They are held as expedients, and are voluntary, and are not even hinted at as a part of the Gospel duty or apostolic precedent.

But Annual Meeting uses Acts 15 as a precedent for doing the very thing it condemns. The apostles and others met to condemn additions to the Gospel, and to liberate those who were seemingly under the conviction of false teaching, while Annual Meeting meets to make additions to the Gospel, and to enslave all under the yoke of its false teachings.

Behold the contrast! Inspired men above 1800 years ago, met to declare that it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to them to lay no greater burden on the membership than these necessary things; while men of this decade without any perceptible evidence of Divine inspiration, acting upon the afore-mentioned precedent, meet on a certain day every year, and spend about three days making customs and usages, and riveting them upon the church by mandatory enactment. Is there much similarity?

Eighteen hundred years ago, apostles met more conveniently proclaimed that circumcision as taught by certain men of Judea, was not essential to salvation and should not be added to the Gospel as a Christian duty; now, men meet to prescribe the shape of a brother's coat, the kind of headgear a sister must wear, how far the razor may go on a man's face, etc., and these silly decisions are added to the Gospel by mandatory compulsion, and their obedience is as imperative as the Gospel, and their disobedience, or even speaking reproachfully against them incurs the penalty of church excommunication.

Annual Meeting, and the meeting of the Apostles as recorded in Acts 15th are absolutely antipodal; the modern convention does precisely what the ancient convention condemned. But above and beyond all this, Acts 15 never can be precedent for modern conventions, as the leading characters therein are inspired men, and their meeting was rather for the purpose of proclaiming their decision than for ascertaining it. There was dissension and disputation to be sure, but not among the Apostles. Paul and Barnabas disputed with them; not with each other, or any other Apostle. The Pharisees opposed the Apostles, but the Apostles did not oppose each other; neither was it necessary to hold a convention to settle the difficulty so far as any inspired man was concerned. The Holy Ghost does not need a convention to enlighten it; neither could there have been the shadow of disputation among any of the inspired men, because the Holy Ghost within them would hardly argue both sides of the case. There were stiff-necked, fleshy characters there who were guilty of adding duties to the laws of Christ, and there were those there who believed their traditions, and this their error was to be uprooted by Divine logic. The advocates of Christian circumcision made a defense of their hobby of course. By this convention all interested in this great question could receive satisfaction by submitting their claims to the judicial balance of the Holy Spirit, and the result proved the hopeless annihilation of their self-instituted Christian duty, just as the record of that convention doth vaporize the whole mandatory code of modern Christendom. We have the Gospel, while Paul, Peter, and Barnabas had the Holy Spirit, which is synonymous, and with the Gospel, we can weigh the merits of customs and usages as profoundly as they did the merits of circumcision. In either case the men preaching them and the errors taught by them, come under the same category and the same condemnation. I repeat that we are at no disadvantage for the Gospel is to us all that the Holy Spirit was to the inspired men so far as to revealing Christian duty. Knowing this, and seeing the result of tradition teachers when they submitted their hobby to inspired men, I do not wonder that you persistently refuse to submit your hobby, customs and usages, to a friendly discussion when you know the Gospel will have its old time effect upon them. Acts 15 has certainly taught you one important lesson—never, like the Pharisees then, expose yourselves, and your augmentations to the Gospel, to a direct range of the Gospel fire.

Whether it was their greater honesty, or your greater discretion, we are unable to conjecture, but there is an old saying that may explain it all, and here it is: "A burnt child avoids the fire."

(To be continued.)

Mental Lunch.

BY J. P. MARTIN.

Popular Theology teaches that it will make you honorable in the world, to be a Christian; that you will command the esteem of every one. Jesus Christ failed to accomplish such results; and yet his was such a life against which the most comprehensive critic—even a God—could not bring a single charge much less the faintest semblance of complaint. You, who are in the evangelical work, can answer this: In the midst of a meeting, what class of individuals are the special material upon which the labor is bestowed? I have known the preacher to waste his energy in trying to reach the good moralist—giving him the feast of good things in vain, but harlots and publicans were caught by the crumbs that fell from his table. The reason of this is that while the preacher tried

to reach the one, God converted the other. Yes, this is about it. There is Mr. A., he is as fine a man as we have in the neighborhood; he is looked up to by every one; I wish you would try to catch him. You ask, "but how about Mr. B? he seems to be more interested than the other?" Oh, he is no body; he would just bring reproach upon the church. You go home with Mr. A., because he asked you; and he only asked you because it was expected he should; and the other, who in secret weeps over his sins, would so appreciated your company, but you would not.

Does man enhance the cause of Christ, or does the cause of Christ enhance man, which? Did Christ or man meet the demands of justice? If Mr. A., who is a good moral man could be persuaded to come into the church he would add so much to it. He is wealthy and honorable, and has such an influence—his dollars would help pay the preacher. You work with him—because you want him so badly, or rather his influence, and he knows it too—until you get him, but what have you done, in your zeal to get him you have promised him everything and anything, you have compromised the vitality of the body—sold him indulgences—but you have got him and now you want to keep him. In order to do this you must dance to his music, these are some of the steps by which the church is turned into a mere moral institution.

But how about Mr. B., what became of him? In your stampede to catch the other, you overlooked him; yes, you did worse than that, you gave him the cold shoulder; for you were afraid he would join church, and you did not want him, because he was a very wicked man and poor. He saw how it was and saw that it was a Christless field and judging all by what he saw, became an infidel.

Could we all drink deeper of that fount of living water; could we all apply more of the oil of grace to our spiritual flame until it would leap from the altar of duty with such intensity as to consume all the wood, hay, and stubble in our nature. If we could do this we could by the grace of God come down to a level with the Nazarene, but to be exalted with him.

It is easy to see why there is no persecution in these lines, because there is but little to antagonize the flesh. We want the rich man for his gold; we want the honorable man for his influence; to get them, we permit them to enter the fold on their own terms. What are these terms—the indulgence of the same principles which brought them wealth and fame? Need we wonder that it is honorable to be a church member?

We don't want the poor man, because he can add nothing to our finance: we don't want the wicked and low, because we would lose our respectability. "Behold he eateth with publicans and sinners," "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." "If the world hate you, remember that it hated me before it hated you."

To come down to where Christ and the flesh are enemies; to where we must crucify the flesh; to where we must bury all our worldly hopes and anticipations; to where we must lay self on the altar of duty and consume it with the flames of persecution, to where all else is counted but dross for Christ's sake, is not the journey of a summer day, but requires a continual warfare.

It is self, through the lust of the flesh, that tempts us; it is self that persecutes us. Self is our worst enemy; and flesh our weak companion. You know that to gain a companion is half the battle, hence evil approaches us through the flesh.

To become alive to Christ is to die to the flesh. Becoming dead to the flesh cannot be explained to the carnal mind; for carnality is enmity; and the preaching of Christ to it is foolishness. You may interest it in him, however, if you mix enough husk and flesh with it to make it popular, and hide the cross beneath self-imposed obligations, and popular notions. But live a pure, simple, consistent, Christian life and they will call you a foggy or an heretic.

Nothing under a thorough change will suffice; neither tears nor trouble of mind, neither good desires nor intentions, nor yet the relinquishment of some sins, nor the performance of some good works will avail anything, but a new "creature," a word that comprehends more in it than words can well express; and perhaps after all that can be said of it, never thoroughly to be understood by what a man hears from others, but what he must feel within himself.—ROBERT SOUTH.

Satan paints sin in attractive colors; but those who will, may see the other side, the end of sin, which is destruction, misery, and death. The glitter of beauty, wealth and pleasure that surrounds sin, is like the serpent's charm, luring but to destroy. The end of sin is destruction,—The wages, death.